

from

Jamberoo Abbey

2025

May there be an outpouring of
Prayer and Peace
over our world at this time



Dear Family,
Friends and
Oblates of the Abbey,

As we set out upon this Advent journey, leading up to Christmas, know that we take you with us holding you and your loved ones in our prayer at this time.

May God's love surround you, His peace fill you, and His joy overflow in your heart this Christmas and throughout the coming year.

May Christ's love shine through us and bring hope to all in our world especially the people of Gaza, Ukraine and Sudan.

May God pour down upon you, all the blessings of this Christmas season.

The nuns of Jamberoo Abbey

Healing the Land

In the last newsletter, we shared with you about our ground drainage work. That work was completed in September, a bit longer than initially planned because of the wet weather.

In October, a follow-up work started. Carmelo, the property project manager, arranged for the landscaper to put down topsoil on all the areas that had been dug up. Following this work, we put down some turf at the centre of the swale, while over the rest of the area we scattered grass seeds. The purpose of putting down the turf in the middle of the swale was to keep the soil intact so that it would not be washed away if there was a heavy rainfall. We could say that this is recovery work when the land starts to heal.





The part that we play in this is to water the turf and the grass seeds so that they will grow. Because the summer seems to be quite dry, we are praying for rain. Within a week after the first lot of turf was put down and the grass seeds scattered, we were blessed with a few days of rain. Thanks be to God for enough rain to get the grass seeds to sprout. Don't they look lovely? We continue to pray for regular rain as there are still a lot of areas where the grass seeds haven't sprouted.

Once again, we would like to express our gratitude to all the donors who have supported us and enabled us to do this work.

Next is the second stage of fixing the leaking roof. We will share more about that in the next edition of the newsletter. Thank you for your ongoing support for us. May the Lord bless you abundantly.
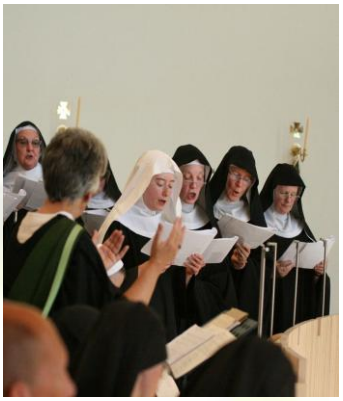
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Structures of Congregational Support

Knowing that she was approaching 75 in January 2025 Mother Hilda Scott OSB, as required by Canon Law, offered her resignation as our abbess.

With this in mind, we as a community talked about what options were available to us going forward after her resignation. We realised that we were not ready to elect a new abbess, so we took a radical decision to go a different way. After consultation with Abbot Christopher Jamieson OSB, Abbot President of the English Benedictine Congregation (EBC), of which we are a member, we took a unanimous decision to apply to enter into a process offered by the EBC to help communities in difficult times.

The process is called The Structures of Congregational Support. In applying to enter these structures we were aware that Abbot Christopher would appoint an administrator for our community for two years,



and in December 2024 he appointed Sr Catherine McCahill, Congregational Leader of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan of the order of St Benedict, for one year. That year was 2025 and as it came to a close, we knew that Sr Catherine's commitments to her own Congregation meant that she would need to resign as administrator. Her resignation took effect on 2nd December 2025. In her place Abbot Christopher appointed Abbess Anna Brennan OSB Abbess of Stanbrook Abbey in England as our administrator on 2nd December 2025. Sr Mary Barnes of Jamberoo Abbey was appointed our prioress. Sr Anna will spend three weeks with us in January 2026 and after that will communicate with us via Zoom. Sr. Mary Barnes will be responsible for the everyday running of the abbey in consultation with Abbess Anna.

We would like to publicly thank Sr Catherine and the sisters of the Good Samaritan (Good Sams) who have been extraordinary in their commitment to us and in the ways they have helped us move forward. They gave everything they had to offer us with great generosity and love.

Apart from Sr Catherine we would like to especially thank Srs Clare Condon, Patty Fawkner and Kerin Caldwell. They are our sisters in St Benedict and their presence here at this time of need has meant that our already close bonds have deepened and strengthened. Thank you, Catherine and sisters, for all that you have given to us this year.

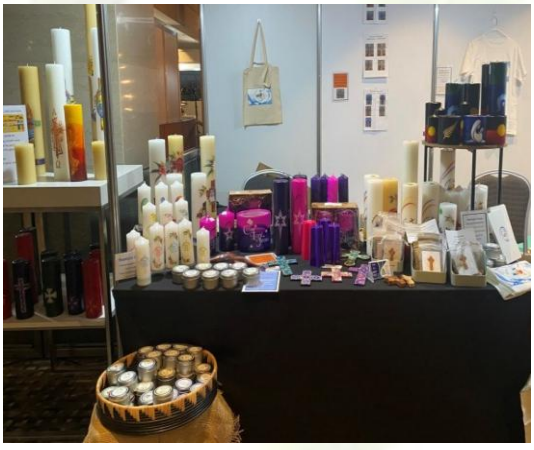
We would like to thank Abbess Anna for agreeing to add us to her already heavy load of responsibilities. Anna is known and loved by our community, and we are very happy to have her oversee our monastic community this year.

News from Abbey Crafts

2025 has been a big year in the craft department. With lots of hard work and some on-road marketing we have increased our sales by $60,000. A good result but we have a long way to go.



We have done a revamp of our shop putting the focus back to "by the work of our hands" and creating a shop policy to keep us on track. In October with the financial support of one of our oblates, Sr Mechtild and Marie, our candle maker, went to the National Liturgical Conference 'Pilgrims of Hope' in Adelaide. This was an invaluable experience in terms of marketing, networking and understanding the needs that we can fulfil for parishes with our candle products.



The craft department has a very skilled and willing group of workers, multi-tasking and absolutely committed to working with us to promote our small monastic business. This year has been a case of shifting sand with all of our junior sisters having formation time away and the employed workers have stepped up with great zeal and supported this. We are so grateful because in a monastic context the formation of our sisters is priority.

New book explores the 'journey of dying'



Sr Antonia has completed the writing of her new book the title of which is ***Dying to Die.*** She explains how she came to write it in the foreword saying: *Conjecturing sums it up very well for me: I am writing through a glass darkly (1 Cor.13:12), imagining what I might experience when I finally go through the journey of dying.*
The book has been a while in the making. Having turned a 'good age' myself, I had been thinking about dying more than I normally would and it occurred to me that I could be helped by writing my thoughts down. In doing so my idea was to open up for myself what St Benedict in his rule would have to say to me about the dying process. I was hoping to find a way whereby I could prepare myself to enter fully into the journey of dying, with Benedict as some kind of guide. Perhaps it sounds odd to say that I wanted to plan how I would like to enter into the journey of my dying, but to me it seemed important. Knowing full well that I could die suddenly, without a moment to enter into the process, didn't deter me from reflecting on this question.

At some stage during the writing process a whole new aspect of the book presented itself to Antonia and she went with the idea happily and hopefully. We have many oblates and friends attached to our community who, one way or another, are experienced in the area of death and bereavement. What if she were to ask some of them to contribute a chapter to this book she wondered. She was excited as she thought about it and eagerly approached our oblate Dr Sarah Thompson (Kirsop). Dr Sarah is a palliative care physician. She also asked her biological sister, Kerry Wensing, if she too would be prepared to write a chapter about their own sister Liz's death. They both said yes without a moment's hesitation. Next, she approached Fr Paul Gurr O. Carm who was thrilled to be asked to write a chapter. Paul had had experience working with a funeral director in Wollongong during the time he was our chaplain here at the abbey. And finally, her friend from London, Jamie Moran, offered to share an experience he had when spending an extended time living on a Sioux Indian reservation in the United States.

The generosity with which these people responded told her that perhaps the Holy Spirit had been active in the process. Apart from asking them to share their experiences of caring for the dying she left the choice of what they would write to each of them, without trying to tie them down to fit in with what she was doing. Sr Antonia is leaving it to God as to what happens with the book now that it is finished. Will it be published she wonders? Or was the experience just for herself? Time will tell.

News from the Cottages



Retreats

24-26 October - Sr Antonia and Dr John Lee led a weekend retreat reflecting on the cry of the earth to keep alive the beauty and richness of God's creation. 14–16 November - Sr Julian led a very popular retreat on Contemplative Creativity – generating much interest in contemplative prayer and practice.
29 November - Sr Magdalen facilitated a day where the three main Illawarra and South Coast Christian Meditation groups came together for a joyful shared experience of meditation.

5 December - We were delighted to welcome Bishop Brian and the staff of the Office of the Bishop to a day retreat in our yurt Conference area.
6 December - Advent retreat hosted 50 participants who enjoyed a day spending time with Christ. The day retreat was led by Srs Magdalen, Petra and Julian – and offered a mosaic of input ranging from quiet prayer to exploring liminal Advent space to chanting with the Jesus prayer.

St Scholasticas Cottage has been now completely demolished and the site will be grassed and used as an area for sitting and contemplating, for praying and simply being in this God filled area. We are looking forward to replanting and offering this re-visioned space for our guests.

Retreat Cottage team

We welcome Simon Perini to our staff, working two days a week in our cottages and also John Turek as groundsman and handyman for several hours two days per week. Their contribution is greatly appreciated.
The 2026 retreat program is currently being developed and will be published on our website soon.

Farewell to Polly



Many of you would know of Polly, Sr Hildegard's little Tibetan Spaniel. She came into Hildie's care as a young puppy. Hildie had just come home from hospital and her family bought her the little dog. She was named after Hildie's grandmother. Recently Polly's health deteriorated and she died on the 31st of October 2025. She was 14 years old. Polly was an extraordinary creature, a gentle and knowing little dog who laughed and smiled and loved with a big heart. For a time she had a bed at the organ in the church where Hildie would be playing. She also used to accompany Hildie to Bunning's nursery shopping where she would sit in her trolley and greet people. Everybody loved Polly. We have been especially blessed to have shared her life with us in the monastery and we are grateful to all those who cared for Polly in her later years.

A time of formation and lived wisdom

Spending six months at Stanbrook Abbey while continuing my studies at the University of Divinity offered unexpected gifts. Practically, Zoom made attending classes possible despite the time difference, and both communities were generous in supporting this arrangement. But the deeper formation happened in daily life. Studying while experiencing a community that genuinely lives, mutual service and shared responsibility, gave weight to theological concepts. The experience taught me that formation isn't only formal education. It's also witnessing different expressions of Benedictine life and discovering that practices can be flexible while remaining faithful to the Rule. Living in another community broadened my understanding of what's essential to monastic life versus what's negotiable. I'm grateful for the opportunity to experience both academic learning and lived wisdom during those months. I am also very grateful to the individual sisters from Stanbrook who spent time with me to broaden my studies especially Sr Mary Peter who spent time every week with me to help provide some foundational study in New Testament Greek which I am hoping to study at university next year. I was also fortunate to have opportunities to attend talks provided by people outside the Stanbrook community including Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, which was a true highlight of my stay.



Welcome to our new Chaplain

Following the departure of Fr Wayne Stanhope O. Carm some months ago, our new Chaplain, Fr Denis Minns OP, arrived to begin his time with us on the First Sunday of Advent. Fr Denis is now living in the Chaplain's residence on our property, and Mass in the Abbey Church has resumed as usual.



The community celebrated the arrival of Fr Denis with a Morning Tea with him - an opportunity to welcome him and to 'get to know him' as he shares his wisdom with us, especially through his thoughtful and inspiring homilies.

We are grateful to the Carmelite Fathers for their presence with us over many years especially through the ministry of Fr Paul and Fr Wayne. We have been blessed by their presence. We are also appreciative of the priests and parishioners of St Matthew's, Jamberoo who made us very welcome as we joined them for Sunday Mass while we awaited Fr Denis's arrival. Our bonds of friendship were strengthened especially during this time.



Fr Denis was born and grew up in Sydney. He joined the Dominican Order in 1967 and was ordained to the priesthood in 1976. He has taught the history and theology of the early Church (patristics), Greek and Latin in Melbourne, Oxford and Sydney and has published books on St Irenaeus and Justin Martyr and English translations of two of the journals of the French Dominican, Yves Congar. He is a member of the Dominican community at St James in Glebe, Sydney, and before coming to Jamberoo he was priest in residence at St Mark's Drummoyne.

He tells us that he has "a (very) amateur interest in the identification of Australian flora and fauna" and he hopes to pursue this at Jamberoo in our beautiful natural surroundings.

In prayer …



Like so many across Australia and around the world, we have responded to the terrible news of the Bondi shootings with prayer, for those who were killed and injured and for their families, for the Jewish community, the local community, the nation and the world.

May the healing and peace that we long for at this time fill hearts, minds and souls.

"The Lord is near to the broken-hearted. Those whose spirit is crushed He will save." (Ps 34:18)

We pray also for the people of Ukraine, Gaza and Sudan.



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